



OT Summertime Ideas for Improving Hand Skills and Helping your Child to Coordinate Both Sides of the Body

Compiled by Linda Cammaroto

The ability to coordinate the right and left sides of the body and to cross the midline of the body is an indication that both sides of the brain are working well together and sharing information efficiently. Coordination of the two body sides is an important foundation for the development of many gross and fine motor skills. It is essential to the development of cerebral specialization for skilled use of a dominant hand.

A child with poor coordination of the two body sides may adjust his body to avoid crossing the midline. He may not be able to coordinate one hand to move while the other hand is acting as an assist to stabilize the project. He may switch hands during a fine motor task because he is experiencing frustration with skillfully using his hands together.

Good coordination of the two body sides is an important foundation for writing with pencils and cutting with scissors. Children learn to coordinate their body sides when they manipulate toys such as pop beads and legos, and when they skip, gallop, play rhythm games, jump rope, or ride a bike.

Summertime is the best time to do most of these activities and give your child a headstart on school

Ideas

- Take frequent trips to the park. Give your child lots of opportunities to go on swings and jungle gyms.
- Teach them to ride a tricycle or bike. If they are fearful, let them ride on the grass. If they fall, they won't skin a knee.
- On rainy days, let the kids build a play fort or hideout out of the cushions from the couch and some chairs. Put pillows inside and tie up sheets and blankets. Put a basket of toys and books inside for hand and finger play.
- Hippity Hop balls for bouncing are good for helping to improve balance and strengthen legs, and encourage hopping and jumping skills.
- Climbing and crawling over and under large pillows, beanbag chairs, etc., on jungle gyms, rocks and trees, up stairs on hands and knees and through obstacle courses made of furniture are great.
- Summer is the perfect time to get a Sandbox. This is creative as well as good for improving strength in hands and arms.
- Finger-painting outside, with easy clean in the summer. Let them finger paint, and body paint, then set up a wading pool and let them have fun cleaning up. They can also run through the sprinkler.
- Take frequent trips to the lakes. State parks have a free day once a week. I used to always make play dates for those days and meet other mothers at the lake.
- Sand Spray
 - **Description:** Have your child use colored water to "paint" on sand at beach or in sandbox.
 - **Materials:** Spray bottles, water, and food coloring
 - **Method:** Fill the bottle with water and a few drops of food coloring. Have your child go outside to build sand castle or animal. Help them out-its fun to build a turtle or dinosaur. He or she will probably need your help. Other Ideas: Snowman, or woman, Animal such as a turtle or dinosaur, or anything at all. Then have them color it by spraying it with the water in the spray bottle. Dinosaurs might be green but they might also be red. Get the idea. My children loved this and still do. (Improve Fine motor skills Separation of power and precision sides of the hand (squeezing that spray bottle)